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SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka Puts Pedal to the Metal to Clean Up Air

Successful phase out of leaded gasoline prompts further government action to reduce vehicle emissions and improve air quality . . .



“USAID has provided a remarkable amount of resources and global experiences through training. This program has made several important achievements through hard work and setting ambitious targets to attain better air quality.”

Dr. Don S. Jayaweera, President, Partnership for Clean Air Sri Lanka and Former Secretary, Ministry of Transport

Challenge

By 2001, the air quality in Sri Lanka's cities was rapidly deteriorating. Pollution from vehicles using leaded gasoline was one of the major contributing factors. Lead exposure can affect brain development, reduce learning ability and cause behavioral disorders, especially in children. But lead poisoning is entirely preventable, and phasing out leaded gasoline is a critical first step to reducing exposure on a wide scale. In June 2002, the Sri Lankan government launched the 100 Days Program, which halted sales of leaded fuel country-wide. One of the key challenges was to provide evidence to policymakers and the public, that the 100 Days Program was effective and beneficial, and thus keep up the momentum for additional measures to improve air quality.

Initiative

To support the program, USAID sponsored initiatives including an eight-month study to monitor the impact of the lead phase-out. About the same time, the national Air Quality Management Center (AirMAC) was formed under the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources with assistance from USAID and the World Bank.

AirMAC plays a leading role in carrying out nationwide emissions and fuel standards programs and implements campaigns to increase environmental awareness and communicate new fuel and emission standards to the public.

USAID also sponsored a study to identify the most polluting vehicles by measuring the emissions from 100,000 vehicles using state-of-the-art remote sensing technology. This study has also provided baseline data to monitor the impacts of a nationwide vehicle emissions testing program that will be enforced soon.

Results

The USAID-funded research showed a 90 percent drop in ambient air lead levels as a result of the 100 Days Program. Buoyed by these results and the increased capacity to manage air quality, the Sri Lankan government has legislated introduction of low sulfur diesel, and mandated better vehicle maintenance practices, developed an island wide vehicle testing program, and reformed policies on importation of used and two-stroke vehicles.

With the help of AirMAC, proposed standards for emissions and inspections have now been drafted and that will enable Sri Lanka to meet EURO 2 vehicle emission standards for both imported and in-use vehicles by 2007.